

Technical Report:

**Gender and the Agricultural Innovation System in Rural Afghanistan –
Barriers and Bridges**

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Synthesis

The goal for this research has three components. First, to establish the extent to which women contribute to social and economic value adding activities in the agricultural sector based on current incentives, linkages, habits, practices, routines, technologies, and policies. Second, to identify the pathways through which intervention in the current arrangements is likely to have the desired impact of mainstreaming women in agricultural innovation while increasing economic output. Third, and as part of APPRO's mandate to build research capacity in Afghanistan, to utilize this research project as a vehicle to train and mentor two female Afghan researchers in conducting social scientific research.

Using a case study approach, this research was collect and analyze information from primary and secondary sources to provide, as accurately as possible, an assessment of the roles of the actors and the factors that constitute the *agricultural innovation system* in three provincial Districts. The following objectives were defined for this research:

Objective 1: Map and document the agricultural innovation system at the District level of analysis in three provinces, to be selected after desk research and in consultation with provincial actors.

Objective 2: Examine gender dynamics in agricultural production as seen through the three provincial case studies (Objective 1) to identify the impediments to greater involvement of women in the full strata of production stages from the farm to the market.

Objective 3: Identify opportunities for systemic intervention to facilitate increased productivity and gender balance in the selected agricultural production systems.

Objective 4: Compile further research and policy options aimed at gender mainstreaming in agricultural production.

Research Problem

The research question for this study was:

How can the systemic barriers to gender mainstreaming in agricultural production be accounted for, overcome, or neutralized through increased productivity in agricultural production?

This problem statement did not change in the course of the study. There were, however, changes to the scope of the study, which was redefined to focus on the innovation system for one key agricultural product: Saffron. The rationale for this change was threefold. First, the researchers felt that much work had been done on value chains of various agricultural products without any serious attention to gender in production or adoption of an innovations systems perspective. In addition saffron had so far been understudied from a systems perspective and as a viable product to replace poppy as a key income-generating product for many farmers.

Second, based on an intensive and in-depth study of the saffron value chain / innovation system

with a focus on gender it would be possible to apply the tested framework to other agricultural products particularly since much of the information on other products was readily available.

Finally, given the resources for this study it was felt that it would be better to complete the study of one product fully before embarking similar studies of other products. Using the same theoretical framework developed and tested for the saffron study, APPRO intends to carry out two further studies, one on grapes/raisins and another on almonds. The data for these two further studies will come mainly from secondary sources as there is a wealth of information already available.

The four objectives set for this study, above, were all met for saffron. The key findings are reported in the next section.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Saffron is suited to the semi-desert and rugged ecology of Afghanistan, particularly in the western provinces, the northeast (Badakhshan), Central (Laghman, Panjshir, and Wardak), and some Southern (Herat, Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Zabul) regions. The success experienced in the Herat province has much to offer as far as learning for other ecologically comparable provinces throughout Afghanistan.

There is increasing awareness among the international aid agencies and PRTs about the untapped potential of saffron as a legitimate, lucrative, and alternative means to generate livelihood for a large number of rural communities. The efforts to build the saffron farming sectors have come from Iran, Turkey, The Netherlands, United States, and Denmark and have involved collaboration with academic institutions such as Herat and Kabul Universities and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. Efforts to consolidate these initiatives need to be intensified.

Growing poppy for receiving cash from illegitimate sources or for the purpose of producing drugs for recreational use is not approved of traditionally or by Islam. This prevalent cognitive institution needs to be fully tapped into to switch poppy growers to saffron.

If saffron is to be used as a means to fight poppy cultivation and as a source of much needed income in rural communities, macro-measures need to be put in place to create an enabling environment for the saffron entrepreneurs to establish themselves through being protected from unfair competition by other newcomers to the saffron market such as Australia, China, and Turkey.

Saffron cannot be seen as the panacea for all of Afghanistan's agricultural / livelihood / gender / drug problems despite its great potential. However, much can be done to mainstream the crop by increasing human capital, technology appropriation, quality standardization, and marketing.

Women, even those who run their own businesses, are largely excluded from the higher stages of the saffron value chain. This is due to inequitable chain governance and the traditionally

structured saffron sector. In the absence of structures for a more equitable system of governance, the only immediate practical option is to work toward creating a critical mass of networked women producers who could contend in the market collectively.

There are fewer possibilities at the lower stages of the value chain for gender mainstreaming except, perhaps, labour market reform to pay women a fair wage for equal work with men. Such reform is, however, a function of other macro factors and beyond the immediate reach of the chain.

Lessons other than acquiring technical expertise are to be learned from the main saffron producer, Iran. Allegedly, Iran intentionally exports 85 percent of its saffron to Europe unprocessed and unpackaged so the saffron could be sold on international markets as having been produced in Spain or the United Arab Emirates. While the analysis of this behaviour is beyond the scope of this research, it is clear that Afghanistan need not, at least immediately, concentrate on maximizing its domestic value adding capacity but can benefit from expanding the size of the saffron sector.

Two sets of constraints to women can be identified in agricultural production. *Organizational constraints* such as access to land and capital limit the opportunities for women who want to and are capable of starting up saffron producing enterprises. *Institutional constraints* such as ineffective regulations, insufficient government programmes to encourage women to engage in entrepreneurial activity, and strongly held views about the place of women in Afghan society can and do limit the opportunities of even those who overcome organizational constraints.

Despite organizational and institutional constraints, there are a number of opportunities for women entrepreneurs in general and women saffron producers in particular. For example, there are a number of women's associations and borrower groups who, with the help of national and international NGOs and MFIs, have managed to start up their own businesses. In the case of saffron, there is sufficient information and support from INGOs such as DACAAR for the women wishing to start their own production.

The introduction of saffron to Afghanistan by DACAAR in 1998 has been highly successful though requires scaling out and scaling up. The "new" crop, saffron, has strong historical roots to the region and thus acceptable to farmers willing to switch from other crops. However, start-up investment is a prerequisite to institute a new crop. The distribution of free bulbs by DACAAR and other agricultural extension agencies seems to have played a key role in luring farmers to experiment with the new crop.

It will be easier to draw other farmers to plant saffron if they are assured that in first 1-3 years they have access to emergency funds to support their livelihood until the saffron reaches maturity and produces economically.

While some organizing has taken place by women who have formed producer associations in and around Herat, more work could and should be done to promote the formation of women's grower/producer associations through awareness raising and increasing the availability of start-up funds. At the same time, MISFA and the MFIs will need to be engaged in plans to mainstream more women into saffron production in rural areas by designing new financial products suited to the needs of saffron production.

Project Implementation and Management

This research adopted a case study approach and drew on data and information from primary (interviews and focus group discussions) and secondary (available reports and other documents). The report produced from this study, available at APPRO's website at: www.appro.org.af, is based on an analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. The key challenge in conducting this research, as with all research in Afghanistan, was the logistics and the numerous delays in reaching key informants and obtaining relevant information due to factors beyond the researchers' control.

Project Outputs and Dissemination

The first output of this study is currently available through APPRO's website at: www.appro.org.af. Since the report was placed on the website in November 2010, there have been around 300 "hits" (downloads) by a variety of sources.

Two further reports are planned as additional outputs of this study. The theoretical framework used in the saffron study will be applied to the production of raisins and almonds. A final synthesis report will draw on all three outputs (reports on saffron, raisins, and almonds) to highlight the key lessons for further research and the policy implications.

During the course of this study conscientious efforts were made to train two female Afghan researchers in interviewing and conducting focus group discussions.

APPRO is currently seeking to engage DACAAR, a key implementing organization in the saffron production project in Afghanistan, in discussions on how best to address gender in saffron production and value chain governance issues.

Recommendations

The duration for this study was 18 months. A more realistic duration, in retrospect, would have been between 9-12 months.

There was one gathering in Delhi in January 2010 2-3 months after the commencement of the study and approval of the funds by IDRC. Given the multi-country feature of this IDRC funding stream, and given the similarities and differences among the country contexts and themes, it would have been fruitful to have had more such gatherings to share experiences from the field

with other research teams and with IDRC personnel in Delhi and from Ottawa.

Research in Afghanistan is very challenging due to security limitations and, compared to other African and south Asian countries, rather expensive. In addition to utilizing the funding from IDRC, the saffron report produced by APPRO drew on other resources. The remaining two briefs on raisins and almond value chains and the final synthesis report will also draw on APPRO's other resources.